

# You and your family's health, property, food and water may be at risk.

**A. What is sewage sludge?** Sewage sludge, also called "biosolids," is spread on farmland in nearly 70 counties in North Carolina. The term "biosolids" was a term chosen by industry to make sewage sludge more acceptable to the public.

## **B. Where does it come from?**

Sewage sludge is the solids and semi-solids that are filtered from wastewater before it is treated and discharged into rivers



and streams. Anything flushed down the toilet or dumped down the drain from homes, schools, hospitals, businesses, and industries flows through the sewer system to wastewater treatment plants.

## **C. Is sewage sludge treated to make sure it's safe?**

Treatment only removes some metals, germs and chemicals. Treatment plants are not equipped to remove the thousands of chemicals, metals, pharmaceutical drugs, viruses, bacteria, and other toxic substances found in sewage sludge that can contaminate our food, water, soil, and air.

**D. Who's doing the spreading?** Wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) often contract with companies or "applicators" to spread sewage sludge on farmlands. Spreading sludge is done using large tankers and often is accompanied by a foul odor, but not always. Fragrance is sometimes used to mask odors.

## **E. Why is sewage sludge spread on farmlands?**

Over half of all sewage sludge generated in the U.S. gets spread on farmlands as fertilizer. Farmers like using sewage sludge as a fertilizer because it provides nutrients to crops. Also, WWTPs provide sewage sludge to farmers free of cost and pay the cost to spread it.

**F. What are the concerns?** There are reports of sewage sludge polluting groundwater, drinking water wells and surface waters. Also, sewage sludge has been shown to harm fish and other aquatic organisms and may also pose a risk to public health.

**G. Have there been reports of people getting sick from sewage sludge?** Some people who live near fields where sewage sludge has been spread have reported numerous health problems. These symptoms include:

- Burning eyes, nose, and throat
- Coughing, chest tightness, breathing problems
- Hoarseness, stuffy nose
- Headaches, fever

- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Sores, rashes, skin infections



**H. Are there other ways to dispose of sewage sludge?** Other methods include burial in landfills, incineration or making sludge into compost for commercial fertilizer. Spreading sewage sludge on farmland is often an economical and convenient way for some WWTPs to get rid of sewage sludge.

**The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League opposes the incineration of sludge because burning emits poisons into the air.**

**If you, your friends or family members have experienced any symptoms associated with spreading sewage sludge OR if sewage sludge has created a nuisance in any way contact:**

Sue Dayton, Program Coordinator  
NC Healthy Communities

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## What do we know about sewage sludge?

- Sewage sludge, also called "biosolids," is spread on farmlands in N.C. and given to farmers as a free fertilizer.
- In 2006, the City of Burlington spread close to 30 million gallons of sewage sludge from its 2 wastewater treatment plants on farmlands in Alamance, Chatham, Orange, Caswell and Randolph counties in NC.
- Toxic chemicals and compounds not removed from wastewater concentrate in sewage sludge. The cleaner the effluent, the dirtier or more toxic the sewage sludge.
- Certain chemicals found to concentrate in sewage sludge harm the reproductive and immune systems of fish and other wildlife.
- Spreading sewage sludge as fertilizer has been associated with the deaths of hundreds of dairy cattle in PA.
- Sewage sludge has contaminated ground water and private drinking water wells in NC and other states.

- There is no efficient system in place to investigate complaints about sewage sludge spreading.
- State law does not require property owners to be notified when fields near them are spread with sewage sludge.
- It is not known how sewage sludge might affect human health, but the potential consequences are concerning.
- Public officials around the country receive calls from people who say that sewage sludge has made them sick.



### For more information contact:

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**“Neighbor-to-Neighbor:”**

# What Do You Think About Spreading Sewage Sludge on Farmland?



Blue Ridge Environmental  
Defense League

[www.bredl.org](http://www.bredl.org)